

The International Council for Bird Preservation Newsletter is now published from the ICBP, 219c Huntingdon Road, Cambridge CB3 0DL, England. Some of our Members may like to join the ICBP which is doing such good work all over the world for the preservation of endangered birds.

The Newsletter gives exciting news about the California Condor (Gymnogyps californianus). "For the first time in over three decades, scientists have observed the hatching of a California Condor in the wild. Biologists at the Condor Research Center in Venture, California, say the chick hatched sometime before dawn on 14 May. In addition, during June a second nest with a chick was found in the coastal range; this chick is believed to be about two weeks older than the first one discovered." Biologists of the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Audubon Society first spotted the egg from a telescope more than a quarter mile away between 15th and 16th March. Since its hatching, the adults have been very attentive to the young bird, with both taking turns feeding the chick.

One can only hope that the proposed captive breeding programme of this endangered species will be successful. I recall that there was considerable opposition among conservationists in the USA to this project when it was first mooted because of the added danger to a population of birds which had reached such a critical stage.

Abdul Moeed of the Ecology Division, Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, New Zealand, has sent an interesting reprint regarding the diet of adult and nestling starlings. Readers may recall that Abdul Moeed was in India on a project relating to Mynas. His objective was to assess whether there was any significant difference between the morphology of Mynas in various parts of India and those in New Zealand. In his paper Moeed reports that "Although the diets of nestling starlings and mynas overlapped considerably, Coleoptera, Lepidoptera, Dermoptera, and Isopoda were eaten more by starlings than by mynas, whereas Himiptera, Diptera, Odonata, Hymenoptera, spiders, and snails were eaten more by mynas than by starlings." If any of our readers are interested in the paper by Moeed please write to the Editor.

Prof. K.K. Neelakantan who is one of our most dependable birdwatchers is now engaged on a bird study project at Point Calimere and wishes to acquire a telescope or spotting scope (the latter preferably). He is willing to consider the purchase of the equipment provided the price is not too high. He will also welcome the loan for 8 months of such equipment and guarantees careful use and prompt return. If any reader is willing to help, would he kindly contact Prof. K.K. Neelakantan, Project Ecorecce, Point Calimere, Kodikkarai P.O., Thanjavur District, 614807?

SR Shah writes to thank Lavkumar Khacher for identifying the bird he described in an earlier issue, as the Wall Creeper. He says the description in Vol.9 of the Handbook fits like a glove. The Handbook says "On vertical cliffs, climbs in jerky spurts, continually flicking its crimson wings and poking its long bill into small crannies for insects and spiders. Now and again will let go its hold and tumble through space to explore the scarp lower down or loop off and fly to another cliff, where active hunting is forth with resumed....Flight undecided and Hoopoe like.....with alternated flappings and pauses."

K Jude Sekar, IFS, AWPDI, Bhanjanagar, Orissa, was intrigued by the name Indian Roller for the Blue Jay. During the breeding season in February to March he found that they were very noisy "Making raucous calls and zig zag sorties giving the impression as if they were rolling through the air while flying. Thus, I thought, they earned their name as rollers." The surmise is correct.

V Santharam points out that KSR Krishna Raju in his interesting notes in the May 1980 issue has slipped up in referring to the spotted redshank as Tringa glareola. "Actually the spotted sandpiper is T. glareola whereas the spotted redshank is I. erythropus. As the latin name is used very often, it appears that the bird mentioned by Mr. Raju is the spotted sandpiper and not spotted redshank".

Referring to Shri. Indra Kumar Sharma's comments "On wasting 7 pages of the Newsletter in the March issue by writing an article which had little interest for him" Santharam says "Had I reduced the same article to about two pages I would not have been able to incorporate many details which I thought were important". I had actually written it for the benefit for such persons who are actually interested in this particular aspect of bird study."

PS Thakker visited the mini Keoladev Ghana near Ahmedabad on 9th December 79 and again on 20-1-1980 with Mr. SR Shah. He reports sighting Brahminy Duck, Pelicans, Darter, White Storks, Black Ibis, Nukta, Common Teal, Pintail, Sarus Crane and others. All these birds were in large numbers. On the 25th of May 80 he visited the area again with Mr. Manmohan Singh, from the Vikram A Sarabhai Community Science Centre. On this occasion they saw flamingoes and Sarus Cranes. Apparently this is a valuable refuge for birds as can be seen from the fact that there were over a 100 numbers of the following species: Sarus Crane, Dabchick, Blackwinged Stilt, Little Egret, Cattle Egret, and Cormorant. There were 40-50 Pheasant-tailed Jacana and over 50 Flamingoes. There were also Gadwal, Wigeon, and Tufted Pochard.

I.V. Jose comments on the note by V. Santharam (Newsletter, May 1980) on the social and sexual behaviour of sparrows. He writes "Mr. Santharam's contention that Tinbergen's explanation is more satisfactory than that of Dr. Burton may be true; but this does not mean that Tinbergen's is not riddled with a number of loopholes.....we do not know what purpose hostilities towards females serve in wooing and courtship. We know for certain that fear, and the tendencies to escape, are diametrically opposite to sex desire and sex attraction. We also know that in animals, generally, during the mating season, the male has a non hostile attitude towards the opposite sex.....and a manifestly hostile attitude towards the same sex. If the opposite is the case in Blue Herons it would imply that a fighting propensity is a necessary genetic quality in the parents....."

A Brief Report of Birding in Nainital During Feb-March by Shashi Rai Singh and Akshobh Singh

The Himalayan lake town of Nainital has been a bird sanctuary for many decades. Because of the sudden elevation of the mountain range (peaking at 8600 ft. approx.) at the place where Nainital is situated, the existence of a large lake (altitude 6350 ft.), and the presence of different types of rocks and soils, the flora is very rich, accounting for the richness of Nainital's bird life.

Most of the observations recorded here were made on the Ayarpatta Hill, which faces north, and is more thickly wooded than the other hills of Nainital. The trees which deserve special mention are the Banj Oak (*Quercus incana*), the Moru Oak (*Quercus dilatata*), the Ayar (*Pieris ovalifolia*) after which the Ayarpatta hill takes its name, and the Burans or Rhododendron (*Rhododendron arboreum*). One of the charms of birding in this season is that this tree sized Rhododendron is in full bloom, covered with masses of bright red flowers, attracting animals and birds. Incidentally the Rhododendron flowers are also eaten by man. One is continuously enchanted by the view of the gleaming ranges of the Himalayas which are clearly seen during this season because the air has been scrubbed clean by the winter rains. Another bonus worth mentioning is the abundance of the nocturnal reddish coloured flying squirrels*, which emerge in the late evening, delighting one with their aerial acrobatics.

During the period under reference Nainital is host to a number of migrants. A delightful pair of Whitecapped Redstarts can be seen each year at this time living in a rocky crevice above the kitchen drain at Kashipur House. They can also be observed feeding on the food particles in the drain. Another Whitecapped Redstart and a pair of Plumbeous Redstarts live around the jetty of the Boat House Club.

*These are perhaps the Orangebellied Himalayan Squirrel (*Dremomys lokriah*). Editor.

Yellowcheeked Tits, another migrant, usually in pairs, are rarer than the Greenbacked Tit, a permanent resident around most houses. The latter is not shy and one can get fairly close to it, while the former can only be seen from a distance, flitting from tree to tree. A group of 3 Redheaded Tits, common in summer, was seen in late March.

Hoopoes and Drongos, common in the plains, are seen here only at this time. We also observed a flight of Common House Crows which are normally never seen, our resident crow being the larger and bolder Jungle Crow.

Flocks of Scarlet Minivets with the yellow and grey coloured females following, form an arresting spectacle. These birds are residents. Occasionally one can see the Minivets form a hunting party with Verditer Flycatchers. The Verditer Flycatcher has a very restricted territory, while the Minivets are wanderers.

The Greyheaded Flycatcher is usually right on top of the pyramid of the hunting party. Another member, the Dark Grey Bushchat is the most common Bushchat here - it can always be seen around gardens. At 'Clifton' two males, usually fighting, can be observed, but no females are seen nearby, though they can be seen elsewhere. Tickel's Willow-Warbler, the Himalayan Tree Creeper, the White-eye are also around with the Streaked Laughing Thrushes forming the base of the pyramid of these mixed hunting parties. This thrush, easily tamed, is not at all shy, often venturing into verandas and close to humans to pick up food.

Eastern Grey Wagtails are fairly common. The Hodgson's Pied Wagtail was also seen. The Whitecheeked Bulbul seen in large parties at higher altitudes, is seen in pairs lower down. This bird allows humans to approach quite closely. The White-tailed Nuthatch is usually seen singly but seldom at this time. The Rufous-tailed Flycatcher can be seen at low spots on particular trees - the ones we saw preferred Rhododendron.

Some birds gave us only a very few sightings. One Redvented Bulbul was observed here for the first time ever by us at Hutton Cottage, and one more was seen later. The White-throated Fantail Flycatcher was seen at Clifton only once. One, and only one, beautiful male Indian Bluechat was seen by us late in the evening quite close to the main bazaar. One male Whitebrowed Blue Flycatcher was seen along with a group of sparrows, not in the least bit shy, and allowing us to approach very closely, sitting on the road. In typical flycatcher behaviour it would make quick sorties, always returning to its 'perch' on the ground. Another lone male was seen sitting in low undergrowth a few feet away from a group of workmen. The Collared Pygmy Owllet is another rare sight seen by us only once in a dense oak tree. Only one Great Himalayan Barbet was seen. These birds are quite vociferous and parties of 4-6 birds are common during the monsoon. The Chestnutheaded Bee-eaters were seen by us this year for the first time ever.

The Himalayan Green Finch is normally seen in parties of 4-6 birds sitting on wires and coming down to the ground to feed. We also observed one Greenfinch chase away a male Rosefinch from its feeding ground. A party of 3 Goldfronted Finches can also be regularly observed. Belying their spectacular name, they are dullish coloured birds with a bright reddish-gold patch on the head.

The Meadow Bunting is usually seen in parties of 4-6 birds. The Rufous Turtle Dove never seen by us in parties, but only singly or in pairs, is a fairly common sight. The Himalayan Pied Woodpecker is fairly common, and at this time is seen pecking at the Rhododendron blooms.

A raucous group of ten Whitecrested Kaleej Pheasant were seen in the highest part of the Ayarpatta, near a prominent picnic spot 'Tiffin Top'. One felt rather sorry to see them there, as they are noisy, slow, and rather 'silly' birds easy prey for the poacher, of whom unfortunately there are too many. Also seen near Tiffin Top were the Black Tit some of which almost came within touching distance as we stood motionless, a group of Black Throated Jays loudly advertising their presence, and four Blackheaded Sibias, flying from one brightly red blooming Rhododendron to another.

Lammergeiers are fairly common, and are usually seen singly, soaring majestically near the refuse dump outside the town, but they are rarely seen over the main valley itself.

Numerous other birds were seen by us, but as we could not make a positive identification, we shall avoid speculation and not mention them.

Last but not least, no report on birding in Nainital can ever be complete without due mention of that interesting, lively, perky songster, the ubiquitous Himalayan Whistling Thrush, locally named the 'Kalchunnia', seen singly or in pairs. Its long whistling song is heard every where and is one of the main charms of living in Nainital. It is the proverbial early bird, and is one of the first birds to begin calling in the morning even before first light. For the birder, it is wonderful to wake to the song of this thrush. Till approximately mid March it was not whistling at all, but thereafter it has been calling regularly, and pairs may be observed swiftly chasing each other, making a harsh and unpleasant sound quite different from its song. It is a permanent resident around most houses, and is definitely one of the most enjoyable birds for the ear as well as for the eye - a true birders' delight.

Orange-Headed Thrush - a brilliant mimic by Saumitra Banerjee

On the outskirts of Calcutta there still exist a few dilapidated properties primarily due to their location. One such is a derelict garden over grown and covered by weeds. It has a tremendous potential as a habitat for the local species of birds, and we earnestly hope that it acquires the status of a mini bird-sanctuary someday.

One summer morning I came across the brilliant Orange-Headed Thrush (*Zoothera citrina*) and got an opportunity to appreciate its imitating abilities. When I approached the area I was greeted with a polyphony of sounds consisting of the calls of many species such as the Golden Oriole, the Magpie Robin, the Tailor Bird, the Black Drongo and the Iora. All these were uttered in rapid succession and we were taken aback when we found that the sounds emerged from a single bird the eloquent Citrina. I had my tape recorder with me and the tape will be a prized possession all my life.

Ashycrowned Finch-Lark recorded feeding on Rice Grains by Aziz Banu and T.G. Manmohan Singh

A few samples of Ashycrowned Finch-Lark (*Eremoterix grisea*) trapped at Agricultural College Farm and Agricultural Research Institute, Rajendranagar (Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh) were dissected for gut content analysis studies. This revealed the presence of rice in the gut of these birds. The rice grains were present either as complete or half grains or as triturated* mass.

Although the Ashycrowned Finch-Lark is normally considered as a useful bird feeding on grass, weed seeds, ants, weevils and other insects (Salim Ali, 1972: Handbook of birds of India and Pakistan, Vol.5, p.10), the intake of rice grains as food, we feel deserves to be taken note of. Earlier to this, Shivanarayan (Newsletter for Birdwatchers, March 1978, Vol.XVIII (3) p.10) has reported Sorghum grain as a food item for this bird, which was recorded at Karimnagar district of Andhra Pradesh.

This observation of Finch-Lark feeding on rice grain however, does not categorise the bird as a pest of standing paddy crop since the bird is not recorded so far in the cropped area. The rice grains must have been fed by this bird from threshing yard as the Finch-Lark is generally a ground feeder.

It is therefore inferred that although essentially a useful bird feeding normally on its natural food (grass, weed seeds and insects), the Finch-Lark may be constrained to supplement its diet with cereals like sorghum and rice in cultivated areas, when its natural food items are not adequately available.

*Triturate means, to grind to a powder. Editor

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